

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION



**REPORT OF
THE
COMMITTEE ON MEDIUM
OF INSTRUCTION**

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Report of the Committee appointed by the University Grants Commission to examine the problem of medium of instruction at the university stage and recommend ways and means of securing an adequate proficiency in English.

As far back as 1954, after an examination of text-books in the various Indian languages said to be available at the universities, the University Grants Commission stated as their view that in the interests of university standards it was best to continue to use English as the medium of instruction for some time more. Later, the Commission appointed a Committee, consisting of Pandit H. N. Kunzru, Prof. N. K. Sidhanta, Prof. V. K. Ayappan Pillai and Mr. Samuel Mathai to examine this question. The Commission's reasons for appointing this Committee were stated as follows :—

"While it seems certain that ultimately an Indian language will be the medium of instruction in the universities, steps have to be taken to ensure that an adequate standard in English is maintained both during the transitional period and later. During the transitional period, new problems have been created by the fact that the medium of instruction at the school stage is an Indian language but suddenly the position changes in the first year of the university. Inadequate knowledge of English leads not only to a fall in standard but also to many other problems and is largely responsible for the phenomenon of student indiscipline. It is therefore, necessary to ensure that during the transitional period, students are enabled to acquire sufficient knowledge of English to follow the lectures in the college and study the books prescribed for them.

"When an Indian language becomes the medium of instruction at the university stage, it will still be necessary to provide for the acquisition of adequate knowledge of English. English has become to-day perhaps the most important language of scientific and humanistic studies and Indians desiring to pursue

higher studies in any of these fields will have to have a fair working knowledge of two languages.

"The question has recently been considered by some of the universities and it is possible that they may adopt different policies in the matter. It is therefore suggested that the University Grants Commission might appoint a Committee to study the problem and recommend ways and means of securing an adequate proficiency in English so that academic standards at the various universities may be maintained at a high level."

The Committee appointed by the Commission began its work soon afterwards. The Committee had preliminary meetings with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and it was arranged that individual members would discuss the problem with persons concerned in different parts of the country in the course of their travels. The Committee also visited ten selected universities and had discussions with university authorities and persons connected with secondary education. The Committee also received notes on the subject from various individuals.

In order to obtain information of the existing position with regard to the medium of instruction and the position of the English language at the universities the Committee circulated a questionnaire to all universities and colleges in the country and replies were received from a large number of institutions. An analysis of the replies received from the universities indicated that no university had so far wholly changed over to an Indian language as the medium of instruction throughout the university course. In the professional and technological courses and at the post-graduate level in practically all courses English is still the medium of instruction at all the universities. Six or seven universities use Hindi or a regional language as an alternative medium of instruction and a few universities permit the use of an Indian language along with English for answering examination questions, while retaining English as the medium of instruction.

It was apparent from the replies of the universities that the fear expressed by the Commission was well founded, namely, that

different practices had been adopted at different universities and that the position was somewhat confused.

The evidence available to the Committee both from the replies received from the universities and from discussions with persons concerned with university education was definitely that academic standards at the universities had deteriorated during the last few years; and that the uncertainty regarding the position of English and the reduced time given to the teaching of it in schools and also the fact that it was being taught by inadequately trained and poorly qualified teachers had all contributed to this lowering of standards, along with other factors such as overcrowding, etc. We were informed that one of the problems that many universities had to tackle was that of securing reasonable proficiency in English among students admitted to university courses. Of the universities who replied to the questionnaire only four thought that students had an adequate knowledge of English at the time of entrance to the university. Most of the universities also thought that students had difficulty in reading books in the English language available in the university libraries. In all the university and college libraries by far the largest majority of books are in the English language and the difficulty experienced by many students in comprehending what they read was making the libraries a less useful adjunct to the educational process.

It is necessary to consider the place of English in our educational system dispassionately and in purely academic terms. We were told by many persons in the course of discussions that the teaching and learning of English had been adversely affected by the psychological attitude that had been created in the years immediately following Independence. They were of the opinion that a great deal of perhaps unthinking prejudice had been engendered against English, and there seemed to be a fear that if the study of English was allowed to continue the Indian languages would not receive adequate encouragement. This prejudice had to be dispelled. A language that has been and is being familiarly and effectively used by a number of people in a country cannot be dismissed as "totally foreign". Much of India's history in the last hundred and fifty

years or so is recorded in English. It is in English that we debated the political problems of the country. The Indian National Congress used the English language for all its deliberations ; there was no other language in which these deliberations could have been conducted. English has played an important role in the development of our national unity. The leading newspapers and journals in our country have used the English language. Our laws have been enacted in English and are administered in English. A good part of our commercial business, national and international, is transacted in English. It was in English that the Constitution of the Indian Republic was written. For a small but not insignificant number of citizens of India English is the mother-tongue. The use of the English language in our schools and colleges for over a hundred years has given to it a position of such importance that it cannot be totally abolished without causing very great damage to the whole system. During the century or so in which India has learned the English language, the importance of that language in the international world has grown, and even in the changed political situation of India it seems greatly desirable for Indian students to continue to learn English. We have found that the study of a foreign language is obligatory in the educational system of many civilised countries of the world, and that in a large number of them the preferred foreign language is English. This is true of countries like Japan and Indonesia in the East and many of the countries in the West.

It is profitable to recall here what was said on this subject by the Radhakrishnan Commission :

"English, however, must continue to be studied. It is a language which is rich in literature—humanistic, scientific and technical. If under sentimental urges we should give up English we would cut ourselves off from the living stream of ever growing knowledge. Unable to have access to this knowledge, our standards of scholarship would fast deteriorate and our participation in the world movements of thought would become negligible. Its effects would be disastrous for our practical life, for living nations must move with the times and must respond quickly to the challenge of their surroundings.

English is the only means of preventing our isolation from the world, and we will act unwisely if we allow ourselves to be enveloped in the folds of a dark curtain of ignorance. Our students who are undergoing training at schools which will admit them either to a university or to a vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them access to the treasures of knowledge, and in the universities no student should be allowed to take a degree who does not acquire the ability to read with facility and understanding works of English authors. We must take into account our *Yugadharma*. A sense of the oneness of the world is in the making and control over a medium of expression which is more widespread and has a larger reach than any of our languages to-day will be of immense benefit to us."

The question then is not whether or not English should be retained as a subject of study in our educational system but rather what importance should be attached to it and what stress should be laid on teaching and learning it.

Most of the university people with whom we had discussions were emphatically of the view that the change from English to an Indian language as the medium of instruction at the university stage should not be hastened. This view was expressed not only by teachers of the natural sciences but also by teachers of the humanities and social sciences. The change to an Indian language, they said, should be preceded by an adequate preparation both in the cultivation of the Indian language concerned as a medium of expression for learned purposes and by preparation of a sufficient body of learned literature in that language in all subjects of study. It is not enough to have a few text books translated into the Indian languages. It should be necessary to have original books written and an adequate literature created in these languages.

We find that the Official Language Commission has recommended the following system regarding the medium of instruction in universities :—

- (1) Universities should have the freedom to decide for themselves whether they would adopt the regional language

or Hindi as the general medium in their respective Universities.

- (2) It may be left to the Universities themselves to decide in concert with each other, and after due deliberation in their established organs of consultation like the Inter-University Board, in what faculties, particularly in the professional subjects and Natural Sciences, and at what stages, particularly whether in the post-graduate stage, the teaching should be through a common medium of Hindi *alone* in all Universities on the displacement of the English medium.
- (3) All Universities should in any event be required to arrange to examine students offering themselves for any university examinations with Hindi as the medium of instruction.
- (4) All affiliating Universities should also be under obligation to offer affiliation on equal terms to any colleges or institutions teaching through Hindi as the medium of instruction for any of their courses in the territorial jurisdiction of the University.

We note that apart from the Notes of Dissent appended to the Report, divergent views on this particular question of medium of instruction in universities have been expressed by two other members of the Commission.

The evidence available to us clearly indicated that all the universities of the country will not adopt Hindi as the medium of instruction. Some of the universities emphatically asserted that when they changed they would adopt the regional languages. When that happens there will be real confusion in the academic world, unless all university students have an adequate mastery of a second language which can be effectively used by them for the highest academic purposes. We therefore feel strongly that a change in the medium of instruction should be effected only after careful preparation : and even when a change is made, English should continue to be studied by all university students.

The Official Language Commission, though anticipating and recommending the eventual displacement of English as a medium of

instruction at the university level, was careful enough to add that there should be "no undue precipitancy about it." It further said :

"We are, however, quite clear that, even when English ceases to be a medium of instruction in our universities, it would be necessary for us for a long time to come to provide that the graduates emerging from our universities, especially in the scientific subjects, are equipped with a sufficient command of English (or other suitable advanced foreign language) to serve as a 'key' to the storehouse of knowledge not yet available in the Indian languages and as a 'window' to the rapid progress of technology and scientific knowledge that is constantly taking place in the world. It is obvious that we must ensure that educational standards do not deteriorate. We need high standards of knowledge and skill, more than ever, for the prosecution of technological advance in our country and for its economic development, for which immense opportunities have opened up before us since the attainment of Independence. By reason of its own merits, as probably the foremost language in the world today, by reason of the treasures of scientific knowledge in every field that exist therein and the fact that the most up-to-date advances of such knowledge are made rapidly available in that language, and the further fact that for a long time to come we would not be in a position to establish for ourselves an alternative 'pipeline' for the stream of knowledge and scientific progress in the world, the English language must necessarily form a component of the equipment of an Indian graduate, especially in the scientific subjects or technologies and perhaps, to a lesser extent, in the professions. We make a vital distinction between using the English language as 'a second language' for these special purposes and using it as the medium of instruction for the imparting of all knowledge at the important stage of the university in our educational system. While we welcome its progressive elimination as the medium of instruction, we are conscious of the necessity for maintaining adequate provisions and standards for imparting its knowledge, as a language, at appropriate stages and in appropriate faculties in our universities."

Obviously, then, apart from the question of the medium of instruction and even assuming an adequate supply of books in the Indian languages it would certainly be desirable for our university students to have a good working knowledge of a foreign language such as English, both for purposes of supplementing their reading and as a language of international communication.

From our examination of the problem it was quite clear to us that an adequate knowledge of English among our university students could not be secured without a proper foundation in English being laid at the secondary school stage. We found that the practice in the various States in the matter of teaching English in the high schools varied considerably. From a large number of replies received to our questionnaire and in the opinion of many persons with whom we discussed the matter it would be desirable to teach English as a compulsory subject in all our high schools for a period of six to eight years. A convenient point at which to introduce the English language may be the post-primary or junior basic year, that is, the 5th class. Even with eight years of English teaching at the school stage it would be difficult to obtain a reasonably high standard of English without the use of more efficient methods than those that appear to be used in most of our schools today. It would be necessary to have the methods of teaching English at the schools carefully examined so that teachers might be suitably trained and the benefit of the latest techniques in the study of foreign languages made available to our teachers and students. It would be necessary also to have text-books prepared on scientific principles, and we would suggest that the Government of India or the Council of Secondary Education should take up this question for consideration.

As the purpose of high school education is not mainly to prepare students for the university it may be necessary to define the aims of English teaching at the school stage and to have some arrangement by which those who propose to go up for university education can have additional emphasis laid on proficiency in English. For the majority the primary aim of learning English may be ability to read and comprehend, and to some extent, ability to write English. For those who wish to go up to the university, both comprehension and expression may have to be equally stressed and it may be desirable

also to provide some training in spoken English as English may be a supplementary medium of inter-university communication, even if and when an Indian language becomes such a medium.

But we realise that in the present situation this may not be very practicable, as a very large proportion of students in the high schools desire to go on to the university. Schools may, however, keep this matter in view, and make some arrangement to give special attention to students who are likely to qualify for entrance to a university.

If the time given to and methods adopted for the teaching of English in the schools are improved we think it will be possible for a student entering the university to follow lectures on any subject in the English language and to be able to read books in the English language pertaining to his subject. But it will still be necessary to help him to improve his knowledge of the language. At the present time, as admittedly the majority of the students who go up to the university do not have an adequate knowledge of English; it will be certainly necessary to provide for special coaching in the subject. We suggest that in relation to the Three-Year Degree Course which is now proposed to be introduced in our universities the teaching of English be given special attention in the pre-university class. It should also be possible to lay special emphasis on English language and literature in the General Education courses that are being proposed in our universities. The teaching of English literature could be related to the study of Indian literatures, so that apart from its value for linguistic purposes, it could be an effective means of stimulating critical thinking and writing in Indian languages. It may be desirable to have the question of courses of study in English and methods of teaching English at the university stage examined by an expert body and the recommendations of such a body adopted by all the universities. Where English is not the medium of instruction at any university course it would be necessary to adopt special methods to secure an adequate knowledge of English as a second language.

We see no conflict between the study of English and the study of the mother-tongue or Hindi. On the contrary we are of the opinion that the study of English can help in the better study of the

mother-tongue by providing a wider linguistic awareness and an opportunity for a more critical understanding of the mother-tongue.

We should like also to add that in the multilingual situation of India, far greater attention should be given to linguistics in our universities and in our teacher training colleges. The learning of languages can be made considerably easier if problems connected with such learning are properly analysed and recognised and the relationships between the various languages well understood. Language is a tool, and proficiency in more than one language greatly increases the range of contact and the intellectual horizon of a person. A more widespread study of linguistics may make it possible for many of our university men and women to interest themselves in Indian languages other than their own mother-tongue, as well as learning more effectively "foreign" languages like English. With the assistance of special techniques and the use of gramophone and tape records and other mechanical devices it will be possible to learn languages more effectively and much faster than was considered possible in the past. We understand that the British Council has persons with specialised knowledge of modern techniques of teaching English and is prepared to assist Indian educators. We have also been informed that the British Broadcasting Corporation has recordings of a series of broadcasts known as 'English by Radio', which could be readily made available for use in India.

It is in our educational interest to retain English as a properly studied second language in our universities even when an Indian language is used as the ordinary medium of teaching. By this means we shall maintain our international, intellectual and academic contacts and make possible a growing exchange of students and teachers not only among our own universities but also between universities in this country and universities in many other parts of the world.

H. N. Kunzru
 N. K. Sidhanta
 V. K. Ayappan Pillai
 Samuel Mathai

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the change from English to an Indian language as the medium of instruction at the university stage should not be hastened.
2. That the change to an Indian language should be preceded by an adequate preparation both in the cultivation of the Indian language concerned as a medium of expression for learned purposes and by preparation of a sufficient body of learned literature in that language in all subjects of study.
3. That even when a change in the medium of instruction is made, English should continue to be studied by all university students.
4. That a proper foundation in English should be laid at the secondary school stage so that the students going up to the university can have an adequate knowledge of English.
5. That it would be necessary to have the methods of teaching English at the schools carefully examined so that teachers might be suitably trained and the benefit of the latest techniques in the study of foreign languages made available to our teachers and students.
6. That it would be necessary to have text-books prepared on scientific principles and that the Government of India or the Council of Secondary Education should take up this question for consideration.
7. That it is necessary to define the aims of English teaching at the school stage and to have some arrangement by which those who propose to go up for university education can have additional emphasis laid on proficiency in English.
8. That in relation to the Three-Year Degree Course which is now proposed to be introduced in our universities the

teaching of English be given special attention in the pre-university class.

9. That the teaching of English literature should be related to the study of Indian literatures, so that apart from its value for linguistic purposes, it could be an effective means of stimulating critical thinking and writing in the Indian languages.
10. That it is desirable to have the question of courses of study in English and methods of teaching English at the university stage examined by an expert body and the recommendations of that body adopted by all the universities.
11. That where English is not the medium of instruction at any university course it is necessary to adopt special methods to secure an adequate knowledge of English as a second language.
12. That far greater attention should be given to linguistics in our universities and in our teacher training colleges.
13. That it is possible to learn languages more effectively and much faster than was considered possible in the past with the assistance of special techniques and the use of gramophone and tape records and other mechanical devices.
14. That it is in our educational interest that English should be retained as a properly studied second language in our universities even when an Indian language is used as the ordinary medium of teaching.